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From: CN=Patrick Gilbride/OU=IG/OU=R8/O=USEPA/C=US
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Subject: Article - Pavillion

Howard/Paula - FYI - Came across in the news clips today

EPA Critics Challenge Findings on Gas Drilling's Effect on Groundwater
CQ – Posted: October 18, 2012
By Geof Koss

EPA critics are raising new questions about two agency reviews into potential groundwater risks from the drilling practice known as hydraulic fracturing.

Environmentalists say their case for greater federal regulation of the technique also known as fracking was bolstered last month by the release of U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) data confirming the presence of hydrocarbons and chemicals linked to drilling in two EPA test wells in Pavillion, Wyo. At the time, an agency spokeswoman called the results “generally consistent” with the results of an earlier draft EPA report.

In that study, released in December, EPA scientists linked the presence of the chemicals in groundwater at the site to the fracking operations. That directly contradicts the arguments by industry and many state officials that injecting water, sand and chemicals deep underground to free natural gas trapped in rock seams doesn't contaminate drinking water supplies.

But an official with the American Petroleum Institute said Thursday its own analysis of the data shows the Geological Survey did not identify drilling compounds that the EPA linked to fracking in its earlier draft.

“Without a doubt, the USGS results are inconsistent with the EPA's 2011 Pavillion draft report,” Erik Milito, API director of upstream and industry operations, said on a conference call with reporters.

Echoing other critics of the EPA's findings, he cited poor sampling and poorly constructed test wells drilled into hydrocarbon-laden formations.

“We're seeing poor and sloppy work being done,” Milito said.

The USGS data from Pavillion — where local residents have been warned not to drink well water — has raised alarms with the oil and gas industry because it will be shared with an upcoming EPA advisory panel that will peer-review a separate, broader agency review of groundwater risks of fracking.

“We do not object to EPA studying this issue, but a bad study could be counterproductive, and there are enough missteps and unanswered questions about EPA's Pavillion sampling to raise concerns about the broader [hydraulic fracturing] water study,” said Milito.

In response, an EPA spokeswoman said new agency data released after the USGS results is also “generally consistent” with its earlier findings at Pavillion. She noted that the agency is extending the public comment period to Jan. 13 “to give stakeholders sufficient time to consider all data related to the Pavillion” investigation.

Some lawmakers also have expressed concern about the impact of the Pavillion study. Earlier this year, GOP senators urged EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson not only to conduct additional sampling but also to subject it to broader peer-review procedures required under Office of Management and Budget guidelines for scientific assessments that have a potential annual impact of more than \$500 million.

Earlier this week, GOP members of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee urged

Jackson to include industry and state representatives on the panel that will review the broader fracking study.

"Given the importance of this study and the potential implications it could have for oil and gas production in the U.S., we urge EPA to ensure selection of a balanced panel with relevant technical expertise, and one that does not unnecessarily exclude nominees with relevant (and, in fact, essential) industry experience," wrote Science Chairman Ralph M. Hall, R-Texas, and other committee members.

The EPA has already designated the study a highly influential scientific assessment subject to extensive peer-review. As part of its effort to engage stakeholders, the agency is planning a series of roundtables and technical workshops on fracking and groundwater, according to its web site.

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